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ABSTRACT

In addition to exploring importance of rural education, prevailing forces and trends impacting it, and necessity for change, the monograph explores some vital aspects for the future of rural education, i.e., expanded use of modern technology; increased priority among governmental, educational, and civic organizations for dealing with problems and potentials of rural areas; enhanced cooperative efforts among different groups for more effective synergic approaches and better utilization of existing resources; more specific and relevant attention paid to curriculum, structure, and financial reforms in and for rural education systems; significant augmentation of efforts of traditional organizations by grassroot and special rural interest groups; and heightened appreciation of the critical role of rural America in all aspects of a modern society and in an interdependent world. Recommendations include the following: establish a national "rural policy" reflecting the importance of rural America; develop a national "rural data base" for various quality-of-life aspects; give renewed emphasis to research relating to rural education; create programs and train professionals directly related to the needs of rural America; set goals for strengthening rural education based on rural needs; and acknowledge the leadership void in the rural sector and develop mechanisms to correct this deficiency. (AH)

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RURAL EDUCATION: A GLIMPSE AT THE FUTURE

Sixth Annual National Rural Education Conference, P.U.R.E.

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February 4, 1983

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RURAL EDUCATION: A GLIMPSE AT THE FUTURE

It is a pleasure to be with you today. Together, we're going to take a glimpse at the future of rural education. This National Conference signals another major thrust for rural education, not only at the national level, but at the state and local level as well.

An Overview

Before beginning my specific remarks, I would like to share some thoughts as an overview, looking from the vantage point of today toward the future of rural education. It is my opinion that we are entering one of the most exciting eras ever in education and that a vital part of the opportunity for educators lies in rural education. Rural education is a noble cause. Although our institutions may not be Harvards, the concerns and consequences effecting the people, small towns and rural communities we serve are just as important as what goes on at Harvard. I believe that rural education is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and as I discuss the future of rural education today, I hope you will get a sense of why I feel that way.

A beginning of that thought for me comes from someone else's quotation, modified like this: "I have seen the future for rural education and it works." You have heard many examples yesterday and today that prove rural education is important and does work.

Let's take a snapshot of this moment in time in America, and then examine from several points of view what we find. We might ask: What are some of the existing aspects of this moment that are relevant and important to rural America and rural education? Or, what are some of the general factors and trends affecting rural education? From these considerations, we can explore the future of rural education and make some general recommendations for moving rural education forward.

One of the things we know best about the future is that we don't now have all the answers to its questions. This is particularly true about rural education. We do have some answers, however, and do have the capability to determine what it will take to advance rural education, and that's really what we are about today. Instead of throwing up our hands and saying "Hey, we can't handle it," we need to remind ourselves that: "It's a poor craftsman who blames his tools when something goes wrong." Unfortunately, we too often have a tendency to look to all the things around us for the reasons-or excuses-that we don't get the job done. On the contrary, we can get the job done! It's a big job, it's an important job, but we can get it done if we're willing to devote the time, the energy and the resources to make it happen, and I hope we are willing.

Each of you here today is a key in that happening. You are here because you represent the leadership of rural education. So together, let's walk through some of the many factors affecting rural education.

Prevailing Aspects

What are some of the aspects of rural America and rural education that we must deal with today? First we must recognize the "image problem." In many people's minds, "rural" too often connotes a lack of ability, a lack of culture, or a lack of other kinds of qualities rather than a viable alternative to an urban setting. That connotation is unfortunate and it must be countered with fact.

In addition, rural America is very heterogeneous. Rural people, rural communities, and rural conditions are enormously diverse, and as a result, we have a complexity of public policies, leading to a complexity of programs which affect those policies.

The term rural also implies small communities and low population densities. This means greater isolation and greater difficulty in delivering services, whether they're health services, educational services

or regional development. Rural schools characteristically have higher attrition rates and lower achievement levels than their urban counterparts; these are facts of rural life. Rural development is inhibited by limited support services, limited levels of available general and professional expertise and limited role models and exposures for young people.

However, on the plus side, rural America enjoys a richer and more deeply rooted cultural heritage and stability than its transient urban centers. Rural Americans are characteristically sensitive, responsible and caring, and among the finest people anywhere. Rural America has a tremendous number of positive qualities, and may, in fact, be the best place to live and to raise a family, even with some of its shortcomings.

One of the greatest negative impacts on the rural scene is imposed by a policy of our own making, what I call the "urbanization of rural systems." For example, in education, urban approaches are forced on curriculum, on teacher education, on structure, giving rise to policies and methods which are not directed towards creating better rural schools and systems, but instead are aimed at creating wholesale urbanization of most aspects of rural society. Approaches to problems in rural areas are too often urban approaches to rural problems. And too often they fail!

This is symptomatic of a lack of priority in the nation's consciousness which has resulted in inadequate amounts of time, attention, and resources devoted to rural education. Existing strategies, whether conscious or unconscious, have served primarily to ensure that existing deficiencies in rural education continue unabated.

One of the major problems of rural education, or one of the major realities that is a problem, is that valid research is sorely lacking in nearly every phase of rural education.

Trends

Let's now move to some of the present trends which will significantly

impact rural education. The first five of these trends are outlined in a paper entitled "The New Economics and Political Order of the 1980's," by John Naisbitt. However, I think they are directly applicable to our discussion, because they describe the complexities of the future with which we must deal.

1. The United States is rapidly shifting from a mass industrial society to an information society, and the final impact will be more profound than the 19th Century shift from an agricultural to an industrial society. Information occupations are those involved in the creating, processing, and distribution of information, including banks, stock markets, insurance companies, education and government.

   Labor Force (percentages):

	1900	1950	1980
Industrial Sector	35	65	35
Information Sector	low	17	55

2. There is more decentralization than centralization taking place in America--for the first time in the nation's history. The power is shifting not only from the President to Congress but also, from Washington to the states and localities.
3. We are now a truly global economy because of instantaneously-shared information, and the world is deeply in the process of redistribution of labor and production.
4. The American society is moving in dual directions of high technology/high touch. The introduction of every new technology is accompanied by a compensatory human response (i.e., personalizing and humanizing), or the new technology is rejected. For example, new technology life support systems have also given rise to concern over death with dignity.
5. There are the beginnings of a job revolution in America, a basic restructuring of the work environment from top-down to bottom-up. A

whole new attitude toward American workers is on the way. And it should result in a revitalization of the spirit of work and America's sagging productivity.

6. Demographic changes in America from 1970 to 1980 include:
   - Population grew by 23 million, an 11.4% increase.
   - Age structure shifted: Those under 14 decreased by 7 million (12%); those 25 to 34 increased by 12 million (49%); and those 65 and older increased 28%.
   - Regional population shifts: Northeast to south (20% increase) and west (24% increase), well above national average.
   - City growth slowed from 17% in the 60's to only 9% in the 70's.
   - Migration was from cities to rural and surburban areas (e.g., New York City ost one million).

   Impacts of these changes will include:
   - Age structure shifts affecting most social and economic conditions.
   - Senior Citizens commanding increasing political, economic, social and cultural attention.
   - The southeast and southwest attracting business and industry and spawning new industries.
   - Political power shifting from traditional centers in the northeast (e.g., four of the last five presidents were from the south or west, and redistribution of congressional seats, with 17 moving to the south and west).
   - Migration to countryside, but <u>not</u> back to the farm. New residents of rural areas will drastically alter leadership and community patterns, including social, economic, political and religious aspects of the area.

7. A greater interdependence is developing between the urban and rural sectors of society.

8. Schools and institutions of higher education are becoming more responsible and more responsive to the people they serve.
9. More than ever, the psychology of the American people is keyed to playing fair and providing reasonably equitable treatment for all.
10. Rural America is becoming a complex mix of characteristics, simultaneously encompassing the full spectrum from those of the past to those of the modern technology.

Change

As we look to the decades of the 80's and 90's, a key word for us will be change. For education, the 80's could properly be labelled the "Decade of Transition," since there will be more changes and greater transition in education than in any previous decade in history.

Let's talk about change for just a moment. If we're going to deal with rural education successfully in the future, we have to deal with change. And it's funny, we all have problems with change. Change comes hard. This is true, not only for people, but for organizations and for society. Nonetheless, to be successful in rural education, we must address change squarely and forthright. The fact is that we can either direct change to try to accomplish our purposes or change will direct us.

The Future

Keeping in mind the importance of rural education, the prevailing forces and trends impacting it, and the necessity for change, let's now explore some of the vital aspects for the future of rural education.

1. The prospects for real progress for rural America and rural education are excellent. Although inhibiting financial, philosophical, environmental and other constraints will continue, innovative, relevant and forthright efforts have potential for significant impact.
2. In their efforts to be more responsive to the society they serve and to strengthen their relative position during difficult and competitive

times, educational institutions will more overtly establish a rural thrust and develop programs and activities directly applicable to the needs and concerns of rural America.

3. Rural education will experience greater change during the next decade than in any previous comparable period. The 80's will be a meaningful "Decade of Transition" for rural education.
4. Major items broadly impacting rural education in the future will include:
   - Expanded use of modern technology (e.g., telecommunications, computers, robotics, fiber optics, and lasers).
   - Increased priority among governmental, educational, and civic organizations for dealing with the problems and potentials of rural areas.
   - Enhanced cooperative efforts among different groups, both rural and urban for more effective synergic approaches and better utilization of existing resources.
   - More specific and relevant attention paid to curriculum, structure and financial reforms in and for rural education systems.
   - Significant augmentation of the efforts of traditional organizations by grassroot and special rural interest groups.
   - Heightened appreciation of the critical role of rural America in all aspects of a modern society and in an interdependent world.

Recommendations:

Among the most important recommendations we might make for rural education for the future are the following:

1. Establish a national "rural policy" reflecting the importance of rural America and rural education, and raising the consciousness level for and priority of these areas.

   Such a policy should recognize the critical needs and concerns of rural America and rural education and create strategies for dealing

with these problems in order to make this rural component an even more important part of society.

In particular, leadership for creating this new level of awareness and related strategies of action should come collectively and cooperatively, at the national, state and local levels (e.g., U.S. Departments of Education and Agriculture, State Education Departments, and other appropriate agencies and organizations, and our institutions of higher education and schools.)

2. Develop a national "rural data base" for the various quality-of-life aspects of society. To be really meaningful, such a data base will have to be structured so as to allow for the collection and analysis of data for the entire rural sector, as well as for the numerous logical rural subregions around the country.

   Until such time as the proper data is collected and analyzed, it will be hard to gain the appropriate priority and responsiveness for rural problems and rural education. In fact, such a data base will not only better define the problems to be addressed, but will also aid in the appropriate goal-setting toward their solution.

3. Give renewed emphasis to research, relating to the concerns and potentialities of rural America and rural education.

   For all practical purposes, little research has been completed relative to the rural sector. Such research has great potential for solving or reducing in severity long-standing rural problems, and for helping rural America and rural education become even more significant elements in society.

4. Create programs and train professionals directly related to the needs of rural America and rural education.

   Over the years, there has been an urbanization of most aspects of rural systems. Too often we have used urban approaches, urban-

trained personnel, and urban reforms to solve rural problems. Recognizing the shortcomings and failings of such approaches, we need to establish "rural" programs and prepare "rural" professionals to deal creatively with rural problems.

5. Set goals for strengthening rural America and rural education based on rural needs and desired rural outcomes, as opposed to adopting urban goals from related urban problems.

   For example, a goal of rural health should be quality health care. Too often this gets urbanized and becomes, instead, having a high enough number of doctors for a given population. For a rural setting, quality health care may have only a limited dependence on the number of doctors available, whereas some new approaches, such as using nurse practitioners and home health care programs, may be far more effective and efficient.

6. Acknowledge the leadership void in the rural sector and for rural education, and develop mechanisms at the national, state, and local levels to correct this deficiency.

   Little real "rural leadership" exists across the country. Few of our governmental agencies, institutions of higher education, or private organizations, even those in rural areas, have stepped forward with overt "rural" programs and leadership. At best, such leadership hasbeen sparse, sporadic and limited in impact. The time is right now for governmental, educational, and private groups to begin to meet this challenge as part of their overall responsibility.

7. Create a national central office for the collection and dissemination of promising practices, statistical data, and other appropriate information relating to rural America and rural education, as well as for the sharing of services and resources among appropriate

agencies and organizations.

8. Encourage and enlist the professional leadership and technical assistance of greater numbers of institutions of higher education and other appropriate agencies toward dealing with rural initiatives in a more holistic fashion, and provide the philosophical, moral, and financial support required to reach agreed-upon, desired outcomes.

Summary

In summary, please consider the following thoughts and ideas relating to rural education.

1. Rural America and rural education encompass about one-third of the population and one-third of the educational activities in this country. That is a pretty significant minority, and an important part of our total society. It has not received comparable resources, attention and concern. Now is the time for rural education to move forward!
2. Many believe that rural America remains America's future.
3. Let each of us return to our institutions or agencies remembering what Alexander Graham Bell said about opportunities: "As one door of opportunity closes, others open." We must continue to look for "doors of opportunity" for rural education.
4. Norman Cousins writes in his book, "Human Options," in the chapter entitled "Survival as an Option":

> "The human species is unique because it alone can create, recognize, and exercise options. This means that it can do things for the first time. We can reasonably argue, therefore, that human beings are equal to their needs, that a problem can be resolved if it can be perceived, that progress is what is left after the seemingly impossible has been retired, and that the crisis today in human affairs is represented not by the absence of human capacity, but by the failure to recognize that the capacity exists"

Finally, let me leave you with one of my favorite prayers by Phillip Brooks.

Do not pray for easy lives
pray to be stronger men!
Do no pray for tasks equal to your powers,
pray for powers equal to your tasks.
Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle,
but you shall be a miracle.
Every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness
of life which has come to you by the grace of God.